
WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

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Great School!*

Memo

To: Members of the Assembly Education Committee

From: Deb Sybell, Legislative Program Coordinator

Date: February 12, 2008

Re: Support for AB 647 (Educator Tax Deduction)

The Wisconsin Education Association strongly supports Assembly Bill 647, providing a \$250 state income tax deduction to educators for non-reimbursed classroom purchases.

Wisconsin's public schools are among the best in the nation because of our state's talented, caring and committed teachers and education support professionals. With schools struggling with rising education costs and revenue caps, educators are opening up their own pocketbooks to provide needed supplies for the classroom.

Studies show that educators are spending more of their own funds each year to supply their classrooms, including purchasing essential items such as pencils, glue, scissors, and facial tissues. For example, the National Education Association's 2003 report, *Status of the American Public School Teacher, 2000-2001*, found that teachers spent an average of \$443 a year on classroom supplies. More recently, the National School Supply and Equipment Association found that in 2005-06, educators spent out of their own pockets an average of \$826 for supplies and an additional \$926 for instructional materials, for a total of \$1,752.

Investments in great schools build strong communities. Creating an educator tax deduction at the state level recognizes the dedication and sacrifice of educators and helps them cover their personal expenses to educate our children. It also makes the tax deduction permanent whereas the federal tax deduction is dependent on reauthorization by Congress every fiscal year.

For all of these reasons, please support Assembly Bill 647.

If you have any questions, contact Deb Sybell, WEAC Legislative Program Coordinator, at (608) 298-2327.

Mary Bell, President

Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director

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Testimony of Richard Fanning
before the Assembly Committee on Education
February 12, 2008
Assembly Bill 647 (Educator Tax Deduction)

My name is Richard Fanning and I am a middle school teacher in Evansville, Wisconsin. I teach 8th grade science at J. C. McKenna Middle School and this is my 19th year of teaching, the last 15 have been in Evansville. I also live in Evansville, just a short block away from the school. I am a constituent of Committee Chairman Rep. Brett Davis.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today regarding Assembly Bill 647 allowing teachers the ability to deduct up to \$250 of classroom expenses from their Wisconsin income taxes. When I heard that you were considering this legislation, I was eager to offer my testimony as to the timeliness and necessity of letting teachers deduct part of their personal expenses for various school supplies that they incur for their classrooms. This is definitely a benefit whose time has come and I can only hope that the testimony and discussion of the bill here today will solidify your resolve to pass this legislation and forward it on through all of the necessary channels. Let me give you some first-hand information of what real teachers are going through and I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

It is no secret that school districts across the state have had to tighten their belts when it comes to funding the schools and Evansville is no exception. Even though we have been a "growing" district with an increasing enrollment the last several years, we have still had to make budget cuts every year for the past several years. Luckily, we have not had to cut staff and have managed to maintain our faculty and support personnel base. But we have had to make some cuts in other areas, like maintenance and supplies. For example, just a few years ago, when teachers reported for work on the first day, we would find, along with our class rosters, homeroom assignments, and big, red gradebooks, a nice little pile of school supplies. These supplies included different colored pens, a few pencils, some chalk, overhead marking pens, an eraser, a

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roll of scotch tape and a roll of masking tape, a box of Kleenex, and a nice little plastic basket to carry it all in that later doubled as a nutrition basket. Well that is all gone now. This year we literally got nothing on the first day. Not so much as a Bic pen. No supplies at all. (The class rosters and all the grading stuff are now all digital on-line.)

So now, if we want something, we are left almost entirely on our own. So I, and many of my fellow teachers, make occasional trips to Staples, or Office Depot, or Shopko or wherever and buy things like markers, colored pencils, art supplies, etc. in bulk at the cheapest prices we can find. And for many, the costs really add up in a hurry. Let me share some examples of what I mean.

When I was asked to testify today, I sent out a little informal survey of my colleagues around the school district and received the following replies. And these are all Out-Of-Pocket dollar amounts.

From Jeanette: The Occupational Therapy Department spends at least \$300 on games, toys, markers, treats, stickers, etc.

Becky: In art class, \$100 - \$150 on food and snacks for class parties and food for students who come to school hungry without breakfast. And another \$150 - \$250 on art supplies above what the art budget will cover.

Jenny: In music, \$800 that goes towards music supplies for lessons, (reeds, oils, sheet music, etc.). In just one year, over \$1000 was spent!!

Kim: Kleenex \$25. Notebooks \$25. Loose leaf paper \$15. Folders, Markers, sanitizer, etc. another \$145 - \$200.

Diecy: Foreign Language, \$85 for treats, Kleenex and colored paper.

Tom: Math, \$125 for supplies, \$150 food and snacks, another \$50 or so for various fundraisers held throughout the year.

Stephanie: Elementary, well over \$250, closer to \$500, for paper, cardstock and readers and magazines.

Dan: Language Arts, decorations, books, prizes, food, supplies, over \$200.

Amanda: Computers, First-year Teacher, \$70 bucks so far just on markers, colored paper and books.

Matt: Tech Ed, \$75 for truck fuel driving to find welding supplies and other repair items.

Myself: Science, \$75 for food for fundraisers, colored paper, household supplies, markers, and colored pencils.

This is just a sample of what I got late on a Friday afternoon. It sounds pretty overwhelming that educators are spending such large amounts of their own money to meet the needs of their students in the classrooms. Any help that you can give us by way of a small tax deduction to defray some of the costs would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you. And I'll take any questions you might have.

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**Testimony of Jane Anderson-Wood
before the Assembly Committee on Education
February 12, 2008
Assembly Bill 647 (Educator Tax Deduction)**

Good morning committee members. My name is Jane Anderson-Wood. I am a dedicated first grade teacher at Horizons Elementary School in Appleton. I would like you to know how excited I am that you are recognizing our efforts as educators today by your consideration of Assembly Bill 647.

I'm here today to ask you to give your total support to Assembly Bill 647 which establishes at the state level an educator tax deduction up to \$250 for non-reimbursed classroom purchases. In the 28 years I've been teaching, I've spent well over \$14,000 of my own money on my classroom. I am not the exception. My colleagues also reach into their own pockets to provide essential classroom supplies to their students. On behalf of all of us, I am here today to share with you a few reasons why I'm urging your support for this bill.

Have you ever called a meeting and asked the participants to bring their agendas, only to find that when you're ready to start your meeting, they are sitting with nothing in front of them? Welcome to the first days in my classroom! Frequently when I start an activity not all of my students will have even the basic supplies needed – a pencil or crayon. I must provide these items for them to use.

Due to budget constraints, the Appleton school district provides educators with only the basic curriculum materials needed. However, in order for educators to augment their teaching, we need to purchase supplemental supplies. These materials include things like board games to teach cooperative learning skills, books to meet all reading levels, buckets to keep things organized, and print materials to enhance the classroom surroundings because we all know that a print rich environment grabs students' attention and encourages learning.

My dedication to my students and their welfare goes beyond providing traditional classroom supplies. It also extends to their nutritional and physical well-being. Here are two examples. My students are leaving their homes in the morning for care programs earlier and

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earlier. Consequently, the time between breakfast and lunch is significantly longer. Therefore, I provide a nutritious mid-morning snack to my students to give them the added brain power needed to make it through their morning learning time. Sometimes, this is the only meal my first-graders get prior to lunch. In addition, about half of my students do not come to school dressed appropriately for Wisconsin winters. End of the season sales allow me to purchase boots, hats, mittens and snow pants to have on hand for my students. These items came in really handy this year when one of my students was forced to take refuge at a women's shelter and came to school the next morning without *any* winter clothing. He's one of the many reasons why I keep these kinds of supplies on hand.

I have many more examples, but I think you understand. All of these materials contribute to an environment conducive to learning which I can sum up with a quote from one of my little first graders who said to me recently with great concern, "Mrs. Anderson-Wood, first grade is going just too fast!"

I want my students to reach their full potential. That is the reason why I teach. It is also why I will continue to underwrite the needs of my classroom and my students. Your support of Assembly Bill 647 will honor and help me and many other teachers meet these needs. Thank you.